

WASHINGTON, DC --- This Wednesday, Congressman Blumenauer will join with human rights groups and September 11th families to urge the creation of an Afghan Victims Fund. This fund will provide humanitarian assistance for the innocent civilian victims of the war against Al-Queda in Afghanistan.

A strong majority of Americans agree that the United States should provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan civilians mistakenly hurt during the US-led military campaign, according to a new public opinion poll. The survey, which was conducted by the polling firm Zogby International, shows that 69 percent of Americans think the US should, as a gesture of goodwill, offer humanitarian assistance to Afghan war victims. The polling results will give new momentum to calls for creating a US government fund to help the civilian casualties of the war in Afghanistan.

A tele-press conference will be held at 11:30 am Eastern Daylight Time on Wednesday, June 19 to discuss the poll's findings. Congressman Earl Blumenauer, a September 11 victim's family member, and a representative from Global Exchange will talk about the growing campaign to create an Afghan victims fund.

Calls for creating a US government fund to assist civilian victims of the military campaign are gaining momentum on Capitol Hill, among some Sept. 11 victims' families, and with political leaders in Afghanistan. In May, 38 members of Congress signed a letter sponsored by Representatives Jim Leach (R-Iowa) and Earl Blumenauer (D-Oregon) asking Congressional leaders to set aside \$20 million in the upcoming budget for an Afghan Victims Fund.

"The results of this poll, together with the call that I and others in Congress have made to fund humanitarian assistance for the civilian victims in Afghanistan, sends an extraordinarily powerful signal to the Afghan people and the world," says Representative Blumenauer. "It demonstrates that the American people are well-intentioned and committed to helping build a new society in Afghanistan."

The results of the Zogby survey will boost the drive to establish an Afghan Victims Fund. The poll, which questioned 1,012 registered and likely voters between June 7 and June 9, asked:

Hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians have been wounded or killed, and their property destroyed by the US-led military mission in Afghanistan.

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that the US government, as a goodwill gesture, should provide humanitarian assistance to the innocent Afghan civilians mistakenly hurt during the war?

Thirty percent of respondents strongly agreed; 39 percent somewhat agreed; 11 percent somewhat disagreed; and 13 percent strongly disagreed. Seven percent of respondents were not sure. Overall, 69 percent of people agreed while 24 percent did not -- practically a three-to-one margin.

The response was even along party lines. Two-thirds (67 percent) of both Democrats and Republican strongly and somewhat agree; 74 percent of Independents agreed. The survey has a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.2 percent.

"As a majority of Americans realize, the foundations of a safer world will be built through compassion," says Benjamin. "We have a responsibility to help those people who played no role in the Sept. 11 attacks but who are now in pain because of our actions. This is a case where a small amount of money can go a long way toward helping thousands of needy people and enhancing our own security. Hopefully President Bush will join with the American people and take immediate steps to help the Afghan victims.